

## CHAPTER 7: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public involvement activities in this project consider two basic audiences: the general public and the jurisdictions in the region. The general public is key in providing guidance to elected officials on the priorities and values the public places on the development of regional transit services. The jurisdictions are a key audience as their elected officials are responsible for budgets that balance the needs for local and regional services. In developing regional transit services, jurisdictions have a key role in establishing governance structures, setting local and regional priorities, and in developing regional partnerships.

### INITIAL PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Public involvement activities began with meeting with the Mobility Councils in July of 2010 to provide an opportunity for dialogue about the needs for coordinated and specialized transportation services. The Mobility Councils provided wide-ranging comments. Around the same time, two public meetings were held, one in each county, to solicit comments on regional transportation needs and potential alternatives. Unfortunately the public meetings had little attendance. Comments from the meetings are listed in the text box on the next page.

The comments that were received have been considered in this planning effort. It should be noted that a few of the comments are directed to local transit services or will require action on the local level rather than at the NFRMPO level. This is important in two ways. First it is important to understand what the MPO can and cannot do. Second, the distinction between “local” and “regional” services is often not clear to community members. It is important that the 2035 Regional Transit Element reflect the desire for seamless services and also that the plan clarify implementation activities for local entities and the NFRMPO.



## INITIAL COMMENTS FROM MOBILITY COUNCILS

1. A strategic plan needs to be developed and progress made towards implementing it.
  - a. Providing commuter services is an important part of the regional transit service plan.
  - b. Service should be seamless for the user, for both fixed route and paratransit services.
  - c. There should be consistency in fares and services, reducing gaps in services.
  - d. Improve consistency between transit systems in eligibility and fares for paratransit services.
2. Develop stable funding for transit services – both local and regional.
3. Develop linkages between land use planning and transportation policies at the regional and local levels.
4. Develop partnerships or programs with employers that address transit services for employees and/or childcare needs.
5. Develop services connecting the paratransit services in various locations. Generally the consensus was that getting regional commuter services in place is a first priority (and Mobility Council members in Larimer County commented on the value people with disability have found from the new FLEX service). However, there were comments on the importance of having paratransit services between communities that does not require a transfer, particularly in bad weather.
6. Maintaining and strengthening the volunteer driver programs in both Larimer and Weld counties. This will require dedicated funding for starting up services in new locations.
7. Develop a single center for transit service information, at least for each county.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH ON DRAFT PLAN PRESENTATIONS TO LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS**

Once the draft plan was prepared, NFRMPO staff conducted varied public involvement activities that included presentations to:

- Larimer County Mobility Council
- Weld County Mobility Council
- Loveland Transportation Advisory Board
- Fort Collins Transportation Board
- Greeley Citizens Transportation Advisory Board
- Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce – Local Legislative Affairs Committee

Local jurisdictions were also given the opportunity for a study session for councils or boards. All jurisdictions choosing to participate in this outreach activity referred the item to their transportation advisory board. These boards and the mobility councils contain a wide range of citizens with an interest in transportation in the MPO region.

These presentations primarily provided information about the alternatives and offered a forum for discussion. Comments were solicited on the service alternatives and corridor priorities for the development of transit services. Comments were also solicited on the importance of regional transit and on the balance between developing regional transit services and strengthening local transit services.

Good questions were raised such as ones about financing, the level of subsidy that would be needed per passenger, the timing of service development and relationship of regional service development to local transit services. The meetings provided an opportunity for the groups to discuss their preferences and opinions.

The stakeholders on these boards generally supported the development of regional transit services with overall the comments among the participants in support of the Moderate or High alternatives. Boards were hesitant to vote on a preferred alternative, in part because this was their initial exposure to a fairly complex plan. The MPO staff returned to the Fort Collins Transportation Board for a second meeting for the purpose of obtaining a recommendation on a preferred alternative, and the group selected the High Alternative.

## PUBLIC MEETINGS

In order to reach a broader group of citizens, county-wide public meetings were also held. The Weld County meeting was held in Greeley on April 4, 2011 and the Larimer County meeting was held in Fort Collins on April 11, 2011. Each meeting was advertised for one week in the local newspapers, 350 flyers were posted on cars in the park-and-ride lots in the region, and an announcement was sent to several hundred participants in the Van-Go program. Samples of the advertisements and flyers, as well as sign-in sheets, are contained in Appendix F.

The meetings began with a PowerPoint presentation describing the planning process, findings, alternatives, and recommendations. Questions were taken and discussion ensued. In the Weld County meeting, the participants were all supporters of developing transit services. In Larimer County one of the participants was skeptical of the value of developing regional transit services, a position reflective of many residents of the region. Some of the primary questions and discussion items are summarized below.

### Weld County Meeting

A number of questions revolved around the unsuccessful Highway 34 service. Why did it not succeed? What would you do differently? Is there potential for future service to be successful?

Discussion revolved around the fact that Highway 34 is indeed a difficult corridor to serve. A corridor service plan is recommended for this and all corridors to address issues such as business access, pedestrian safety, and connections to local transit services. One option for doing things differently would be to have it operate in more of an express mode, connecting with a direct transfer to FLEX service. David Averill noted that there is a trade-off between job access and effective regional connectivity. One possibility could be not starting service in this corridor again until there is a regional hub and local circulator services around the Centerra development.

Similarly, there were questions about the FLEX route to Denver and its success. It was noted that the FLEX route is indeed considered successful as it is carrying 16-18 passengers per hour. However, it has not yet attained the program ridership goals.

The difficulties surrounding funding for regional service were discussed. An audience member asked if a Regional Transit Authority be an asset for funding and the response was affirmative.

There was also discussion about how the Regional Transit Element relates to the North I-25 EIS. The Moderate Alternative is similar to the preferred alternative in the North I-25 plan. The Regional Transit Element addresses the institutional and financial aspects of service development whereas the North I-25 EIS had

more of a planning focus on overall travel needs and the ways to accommodate those needs.

A member of the audience also commented on the importance of citizens in local communities, the bus drivers, and advisory groups to be involved as regional services are developed.

## Larimer County Meetings

There were participants at both a 4:30 and 6:00 PM meeting. The following summarizes discussion at these meetings.

The 4:30 meeting had the broadest range of views, from rail advocates (seven participants self-identified as rail advocates) who would prefer a more aggressive plan to citizens who question the investment in transit services that would serve a relatively small portion of the population. There were individuals in both meetings supporting the general development of transit services and those who self-identified as supporting ways to decrease carbon emissions.

Several questions revolved around the North I-25 EIS and the relationship of the Regional Transit Element to the North I-25 plan. Why does the North I-25 EIS include an 8-lane freeway before commuter rail? Even with commuter rail, there remain rail capacity



issues that have not been adequately addressed. This is especially true if Burlington continues to run freight on the line. David Averill explained the logic behind the decisions based on his participation in the North I-25 planning process.

There was a lively discussion among participants as one gentleman asked how many people go to Denver daily and wondered why 100% of the citizens should help to pay for service that benefits 5% of the population. Discussion among participants ranged from the benefits of transit service to those who don't ride as others are not on the roads to how this issue is similar to that of school funding. All residents pay to support schools whether or not they have children in schools. There were concerns expressed about the negative effects of buses on neighborhoods and others who felt closeness of bus service to neighborhoods.

was an asset. It was noted that differences of opinions are acceptable and reflect the views in the larger population who are not participating in the public meeting.

A significant amount of discussion revolved around ridership estimates, financing estimates and assumptions, the rates of growth in each community, and how the increased costs in fuel might affect the ridership estimates.



There was discussion of how the same steps need to occur to build regional transit services and the alternatives reflect different views of how fast service will be developed and what the regional network would look like in 2035. One participant commented that he understands the role of this Regional Transit Element but is disappointed that rail is not a part of the plan.

Funding was a significant topic of discussion. There was acknowledgement of the tension between the need to fund local and regional services. A participant noted that in one public-private partnership proposal includes a transit infrastructure fee on buildings. She suggested that such a fee or other creative financing be considered.

There was a discussion of environmental concerns, the cost of fuel, and providing mobility in a world where oil may be scarcer. A participant asked if reducing carbon emissions could be included in the evaluation criteria. It was agreed that this was a good idea.

Greenride, a new shuttle service in Northern Colorado was identified as one that should be added to the other providers. Green Ride provides service to Denver International Airport and charter service throughout the region.